Social Media Conversations and Attitudes in the UK Towards COVID-19


1 April - 31 May 2021
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Key Insights

>> There were 6.8 million mentions of COVID-19 between 1 April and 31 May 2021, a 22% decrease compared to the previous two months.

>> The two most popular topics of conversation continued to be COVID-19 vaccines and lockdown (see figure 1). Since 08 March the UK restrictions started to lift from the latest lockdown which began on 04 January 2021.

>> COVID-19 vaccines conversations had the smallest proportion of negative sentiment (14%). Conversations on lockdown had the highest percentages of negative sentiment (20%).

>> As well as posts encouraging people to get vaccinated COVID-19 vaccine discussions included questions around the ethics of vaccine patents and domestic vaccine passports.

Figure 1: Mentions of key preventive measures, 27 January 2020 - 31 May 2021.
Methods

VCP analysed 6.8 million mentions of the coronavirus outbreak on social media in the United Kingdom between 1 April and 31 May 2021. Mentions represent the number of social media posts referencing a particular word or topic. We assessed changing levels of interest and sentiment towards four preventive behaviours: COVID-19 vaccine, lock down, wearing masks and self-isolation. By manually reading through the most highly engaged-with social media posts, we further identified some common themes and issues.

For more details of data and methods, please refer to ‘Media monitoring report: Social media conversations and attitudes in the UK towards the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreak 06 to 19 April 2020’ and ‘Media monitoring report: Social media conversations and attitudes in the UK towards the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreak 27 July to 09 August 2020’.

Findings

In this reporting period, COVID-19 vaccines had the highest overall levels of interest (1.53M mentions), followed by lockdown (613k mentions), wearing masks (330k) and self-isolation (185k). Interest in vaccines has decreased by 25% compared with the previous two months (figure 1).

Twitter continued to be the top platform for discussions about COVID-19 with 74% of the conversation (figure 2).

COVID-19 vaccines was the topic with the smallest proportion of negative content (15%) (see figure 3). Lockdown had the largest proportion of negative content (20%) as well as the largest portion of positive content (12%).

Figure 2: Top sources, 1 April - 31 May 2021.

![Top sources, 1 April - 31 May 2021](image)

Figure 3: Sentiment towards key preventive measures, 1 April to 31 May 2021.

![Sentiment towards key preventive measures, 1 April to 31 May 2021](image)
COVID-19 vaccines

Although conversation decreased by 25% compared to the previous 2 months, COVID-19 vaccines had the highest level of interest during this reporting period (1.53M). The general conversation was primarily neutral (78%). Negative sentiment edged out positive sentiment overall (14% and 6% respectively), although the majority of top posts by engagement were either positive or neutral.

A Professor of International Politics posted the highest engagement post about requesting the removal of patents on COVID vaccines, stating that “Right now intellectual "property" is not just theft, it is mass murder” (24.6k Reach, 69.1k Engagement).

Jane Bradley, an investigative journalist for The New York Times, questioned why the government offered an alternative vaccine due to the risk of blood clots, but allowed women to take the contraceptive pill (33k Reach, 63.6k Engagement).

The Duke and Duchess of Cambridge posted photos of themselves receiving the COVID-19 vaccine, thanking all involved in the programme (2.23M Reach, 61.4k Engagement).

Several highly engaged with posts questioned the use of vaccine passports domestically, stating them to be unethical and counterproductive. There were also many highly engaged with posts highlighting that vaccination was available to over 18s and encouraging people to go and get vaccinated.

Lockdown

Lockdown was the second most discussed topic with 612k mentions for this reporting period (down 38% compared with the previous two months).

The conversation around lockdown was primarily neutral (67%). This topic has the highest percentage of conversation that was negative (20%), however 11% was positive.

One of the top posts by engagement was the video of a married couple in a care home being reunited, questioning the necessity of having separated them (45k Reach, 13.4k Engagement).

Another post questioned the effectiveness of lockdowns highlighting the similar COVID mortality trajectories in three states in USA that had very different restrictions imposed, referencing an FT figure (177k Reach, 12.9k Engagement).

There were several highly engaged with posts about the lifting of lockdown in Scotland on 02 April 2021 and the anti-lockdown protests in London in April 2021.
**Wearing masks**

Discussions about wearing masks were the third most talked about topic, with 328k mentions for this monitoring period (and a small decrease of 5% compared with the previous two months).

Although sentiment was largely neutral (76%), 17% was negative and this topic had the lowest percentage of positive sentiment (5%).

The most highly engaged with post shared a video of Matt Hancock wearing a mask outside No10, but taking it off once he had gone inside (45.5k Reach, 15.7k Engagement).

Many of the top mentions by engagement encouraged people to wear masks. Other posts questioned the use of masks, giving Texas as an example, where masks are no longer needed and COVID cases and deaths are down.

There were several highly engaged with posts about the environmental consequences of face masks (180k Reach, 5.44k Engagement) (Figure 6).

**Self-isolation**

Self-isolation was the least discussed topic with 184 mentions and a decrease of 17% compared with the previous 2 months. Sentiment was largely neutral (74%), followed by negative sentiment (17%) and positive sentiment (8%).

The most highly engaged with post shared a Brazilian nurses innovative idea to fill two gloves with warm water and place 'holding' patients hands in ICU so that they feel like someone is holding their hand (12k Reach, 21.2k Engagement). Other conversations on self-isolation primarily centred on lack of funds for those needing to self isolate, and questioning the policy of vaccinated people still needed to self-isolate after contact with a COVID case.

![Figure 6: Post about facemasks being an environmental catastrophe](image)